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E.O. 12958: DECL: 11/23/2016  
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SUBJECT: AMBASSADOR OURISMAN'S INTRODUCTORY VISIT TO  
ANTIGUA AND BARBUDA

REF: BRIDGETOWN 1811

Classified By: AMBASSADOR MARY OURISMAN FOR REASONS 1.4 (B) AND (D).

11. (U) See action request para 11.

12. (C) Summary: On November 16-17, 2006, Ambassador Ourisman visited Antigua and Barbuda to present her credentials. She conducted an initial round of meetings with Antiguan officials, including the Prime Minister and the Ministry of Foreign Affairs Permanent Secretary, both of whom identified settlement of the Internet gambling dispute, trade, Cricket World Cup, and deportations as priority issues. In a meeting with the Attorney General, Ambassador Ourisman discussed the Half Moon Bay property dispute. In addition, Ambassador Ourisman paid a courtesy call on the dean of the diplomatic corps, the Ambassador of Venezuela Jose Laurencio-Silva Mendez, met with Peace Corps volunteers and the U.S. consular agent, and visited the U.S. Air Station. End Summary.

Ministry of Foreign Affairs: Gambling, Cricket, and WHTI  
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13. (U) On November 16, 2006, Ambassador Ourisman presented her credentials to Sir James Carlisle, the Governor General of Antigua and Barbuda. In a meeting with Ambassador Colin Murdoch, the Permanent Secretary in the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, Ambassador Ourisman received assurances of Antigua's strong desire for continued close cooperation with the United States. Murdoch noted that "the United States is our main ally," but the bilateral relationship was not without its issues. Foremost among them, at least given Murdoch's focus, was the Internet gambling dispute. According to Murdoch, the Internet Gambling and Prohibition Enforcement Act took Antigua by surprise, as it was passed only a few days after Antigua's Minister of Finance and Economy Errol Court had visited Washington seeking a compromise. He expressed a hope that the legislation was not the final word on this matter and that the United States would be willing to restart a dialogue with Antigua and work toward a compromise. Murdoch urged the United States to consider regulation rather than prohibition as the way to address its concerns. According to Murdoch, "we're even ready to consider co-regulation where our law enforcement authorities could work with those of the United States." Ambassador Ourisman responded by promising to convey Antigua's interest in a dialogue on this issue to Washington agencies. She also stressed that our

interpretation of the WTO ruling differed and that the Internet Gambling Prohibition and Enforcement Act was not a pre-election gimmick, as Murdoch had suggested, but reflected a broad consensus in the United States.

¶4. (SBU) Murdoch thanked Ambassador Ourisman for U.S. assistance, especially in the area of security for the 2007 Cricket World Cup (CWC) and trade. Murdoch considered the visit of the Secretary of Homeland Security, Michael Chertoff, and the signing of the Advance Passenger Information System (APIS) Memorandum of Understanding as key steps forward in the region's preparation for CWC. He acknowledged that the region will continue to benefit from these and other security advances even after CWC. According to Murdoch, the Antiguan government is grappling with other CWC-related challenges, like accommodations. He admitted that Antigua presently has only 3,000 hotel rooms, despite the government's incentives package, which was passed last year to stimulate construction of additional hotel space. He thought that private accommodations and cruise ships could be used to handle any visitor overflow during CWC, but was uncertain on how advanced the government's planning was in these areas. Murdoch also thanked the United States for the USAID Trade Assistance Program, which he said is progressing well. Murdoch has also been in touch with Dominican officials, who have told him that they are also satisfied with the project.

¶5. (U) Reflecting the concerns voiced throughout the Eastern Caribbean concerning the Western Hemisphere Travel Initiative (WHTI), Murdoch worried that the passport requirement would discourage Americans from traveling to the Eastern Caribbean and urged the United States to extend the deadline for airline travelers as was done for cruise ship

passengers. Ambassador Ourisman countered his concerns by noting that most Americans traveling to the Caribbean already do so with passports and that the U.S. State Department is conducting a far-reaching public outreach effort to inform the American public of the new requirement. Murdoch admitted that he understood the need for the passport requirement, given Antigua's "unfortunate connection" to "Washington Sniper" John Allen Muhammad, who had spent some time in Antigua assisting illegal immigrants to enter the United States with forged U.S. documents.

Prime Minister: Gambling, Cricket, and Deportations  
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¶6. (SBU) Ambassador Ourisman's discussion with W. Baldwin Spencer, the Prime Minister and Minister of Foreign Affairs, was very much a continuation of her discussion with Murdoch. Prime Minister Spencer turned almost immediately to the dispute over Internet gambling and argued that if both sides returned to the table, a "mutually beneficial solution" could be found. He acknowledged that the United State and Antigua interpreted the WTO ruling differently, but thought that for that very reason, the two sides should seek common ground and a "modicum of balance." Ambassador Ourisman told the Prime Minister that she would consult with Washington agencies and respond to his proposal at a later date. Prime Minister Spencer added that the region was also very interested in the continuation of trade preferences under the Caribbean Basin Economic Recovery Act (CBERA) and expressed a hope that Paraguay would drop its opposition to the WTO waiver soon.

¶7. (SBU) Like Murdoch, Prime Minister Spencer was very appreciative of U.S. assistance with CWC preparations, especially APIS. Nevertheless, Prime Minister Spencer urged the United States "to go beyond that and put in place additional measures" to assist the region. Ambassador Ourisman recounted the numerous ways the United States is already helping the region. Rather than provide details of what more was needed, the Prime Minister only added that "the United States and the United Kingdom should work with us to ensure that the region is properly secured."

¶8. (SBU) Prime Minister Spencer was equally vague on the

issue of deportations. While he readily recognized the right of any sovereign country to deport non-citizens, he urged the United States to find some "alternative approaches" because Antigua and the other Eastern Caribbean islands were too "small and vulnerable" to deal with their returned nationals, who no longer have any ties to their home countries. Prime Minister Spencer also implied that Eastern Caribbean nationals were being singled out and were being deported by the United States for the smallest offenses. Ambassador Ourisman countered that the United States was doing nothing but applying its laws and that no country or a group of countries was being singled out. The United States has worked hard with local authorities to give them advance notice of any deportee arrivals and to assist the islands in a number of ways, whether it be with security or with community projects targeting youth. Prime Minister Spencer admitted that the United States has indeed been a good friend to the Eastern Caribbean.

Attorney General Simon: Half Moon Bay  
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¶9. (C) Ambassador Ourisman's meeting with Attorney General Justin Simon focused exclusively on the Half Moon Bay dispute between the Antiguan government and Mrs. Natalia Querard, a U.S. citizen. Simon began the meeting by informing Ambassador Ourisman that the momentum generated in late September and early October through the engagement of William Rogers, a former U.S. Assistant Secretary of State, as Mrs. Querard's attorney and representative could have been jeopardized because of Mrs. Querard's latest move. Simon said that he recently found out that Mrs. Querard hired a new attorney, Dr. Joseph Samuel Archibald, who has a practice in Tortola (reftel). According to Simon, Mrs. Querard's decision caused some confusion because Rogers was unaware that Mrs. Querard hired a new attorney, and Archibald was unaware that Mrs. Querard already had an attorney.

¶10. (C) Despite this latest wrinkle in the long-running dispute, Simon assured Ambassador Ourisman that the Antiguan government remains committed to reaching a settlement at the earliest possible date. At present, the government was awaiting a response from Dr. Archibald on the latest settlement proposal. According to Simon, the proposal includes a number of conditions that Mrs. Querard will have to satisfy because the government will not give Mrs. Querard a "carte blanche" in light of the value of the property and past history surrounding this case. The conditions include a requirement that Mrs. Querard provide a guarantee of financing, commence work on the property within a certain period of time following the signing of the agreement, and discontinue the appeal before the Privy Council of the United Kingdom. Although the government was not making the severance payment for former Half Moon Bay employees a condition in the settlement agreement, Simon said that the government would expect Mrs. Querard to make the severance payment eventually. Conversations with Rogers and Archibald led Simon to believe that they considered the government-proposed conditions to be reasonable. Simon hoped that the government would receive Mrs. Querard's response in the next four weeks.

Action Request and Comment  
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¶11. (U) Action Request: The Embassy would appreciate guidance from Washington agencies on how to respond to Antigua's request for a bilateral dialogue on Internet gambling.

¶12. (C) Comment: Both Prime Minister Spencer and MFA Permanent Secretary Murdoch made it clear that Antigua is very keen on restarting a dialogue with the United States on Internet gambling. Undoubtedly, the Internet Gambling Prohibition and Enforcement Act is at least partially responsible for this increase in interest and energy level. Antigua's other requests for assistance on CWC and

deportations are not new, and we have addressed them previously. Antiguan also continue to hope that one day the U.S. Embassy, which was closed during the early 1990s, will reopen. The issue was raised by both the Governor General and the Prime Minister. While Ambassador Ourisman told the Antiguan that the United States has no plans to return to Antigua, we will continue our effort to maintain a visible presence on the island through our consular agent and frequent visits. The presence of our Peace Corps volunteers is also an important part of this effort, and they have generated much good will through their work on the two islands.

OURISMAN